# Chatter Tool on the Cheap

***by John Lucas***

Everyone wants to try out a chatter tool and once you get one you'll know why and wonder how you got along without it. However, because they are somewhat expensive you always want to know if you'll really use it, and if it's worth the money. Ideally you have a friend who has one and will let you try it. If you don't, then I have a solution to let you try one without any investment.

I use a hacksaw blade from a reciprocating saw (Sawzall™). You can find these at construction sites where they are using steel 2x4's. They throw them away by the tons so they are usually laying all over the place.

I break them so they are about 3" long and then grind off the teeth. I reduce the front end to about ⅜" and then put a V shaped nose on it. If you want a stiffer spring for deeper chatter cuts leave it the full width or clamp another part of a blade underneath to add thickness. More on that later.

To use the tool simply clamp it in a pair of Vise Grips™. Extend the tip out about an inch. More extension makes the tool vibrate slower. Less extension makes it vibrate faster. The faster it vibrates the closer the chatter work marks are together.

This is the chatter tool in use. Move the tool rest back about 2". You want the Vise Grips™ on the tool rest. You may need to lower the rest, too. For your first experiments, position the tool so it cuts about 7 to 8 o'clock and tilted down like using a scraper. You can tilt the tool to the left, to the right, or straight up. There are a lot of variables to chatter work so you must be willing to experiment.

Here's what affects the look of the chatter marks:

- the distance the blade extends beyond the support
- how far the tool rest is from the piece
- the flexibility of the blade
- the rotational speed of the work
- the shape of the tip of the blade
- the distance you are cutting from the center

If you vary any one of these it changes the look of the chatter work. Most importantly, remember—a chatter tool only works on end grain.

A good way to learn is to turn a cylinder about 3" long and 1" to 2" in diameter. Insert this in your chuck and clean up the end with a spindle gouge. Now try the chatter tool. You should hear a loud shrieking noise. If you don't, push harder, rotate the tool left or right and up or down. This should get you started. Clean up the end of the piece with your spindle gouge and do it again. If you are successful and get some chatter work you like, cut the end off with a parting tool and save it. I leave a small tenon on the back of the button to make it easier to glue into a project.

This is an example of the chatter work this tool will do on maple end grain. And below are samples of some of the chatter work I've done on Corian, tagua nut, and cocobolo. If you look at the cocobolo piece you will see that the chatter work angles in two different directions. This is what happens when you tilt the tool left for one cut and then right for another. I cleaned up the joint where they meet with my spindle gouge as well as the outer edges.

You can apply color to the chatter work by using a felt tipped marker. This colors the top surface. You can also fill the recessed parts of the chatter work with colored wax and then wipe off the excess to leave the outer surfaces bare.